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SUBJECT: PRAISE AND SKEPTICISM ACCOMPANY ANNOUNCEMENT OF
ELECTION DATE

REF: ABIDJAN 300

¶1. (SBU) Summary. The Government of Cote d'Ivoire has announced that the first round of the presidential election will be held on November 29, 2009. This is generally considered a positive development demonstrating that pressure from the international community to hold elections bore fruit. However, there is skepticism about whether this date will be observed given the many tasks still to be concluded including: completion of the identification/voter registration process, compilation of an electoral list that all key political parties accept, and disarmament completed two months before the election. A Permanent Consultative Framework (CPC) meeting will take place May 18 in Ouagadougou to review the steps needed to keep the electoral calendar on track. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Prime Minister Soro announced on May 14 that the Council of Ministers had adopted a decree proposed by the Independent Electoral Commission (CEI) establishing November 29, 2009 as the date for the first round of the presidential election. The decree provides that the polls will be open that day, a Sunday, from seven a.m. to five p.m. The decree also provides that if no candidate obtains an absolute majority in the first round, a second round will be held fifteen days after the proclamation by the Constitutional Council of the final results of the first round. The two candidates who obtain the largest numbers of votes will participate in the second round. Victory in the second round will be by a simple majority. This is in keeping with the provisions of the Electoral Code adopted in 2000.

¶3. (U) The decree implicitly recognizes that this will be a special post-crisis election by referring to an executive order of May 5, 2005 that provides that the candidates of all political parties that signed the Linas-Marcoussis peace agreement will be eligible to run in this election. (This should lay to rest any controversy over Henri Konan Bedie's eligibility to run because of his age.) The decree also refers to an executive order of April 14, 2008 that modifies some provisions of the 2000 Electoral Code for this particular election. For example, the new Article 52 requires the CEI to notify the UN SRSG and the OPA Facilitator of all presidential candidacies.

REACTIONS MOSTLY POSITIVE BUT SKEPTICISM STILL HIGH

¶4. (SBU) Public reactions to the election date announcement have been overwhelmingly positive although skepticism remains high behind the scenes. Prime Minister Soro said the November 29 date was "realistic." FPI party president Affi N'Guessan said the date is "reasonable" and called for this date to be respected. RDR party president Alassane Ouattara said he had no objection to the date. PDCI party vice-chairman Djedje Mady was one of the few to publicly voice skepticism, observing that this is not the first time a date has been set. Mady said he had doubts about whether the November date would be respected. Reactions from the

international community have been positive. UNOCI issued a statement congratulating the government of Cote d'Ivoire for setting a date but stressing the need to push ahead with reunification to ensure the election can be held.

CPC TO REVIEW NEXT STEPS

15. (SBU) The CPC, which comprises Presidents Gbagbo and Compaore, Prime Minister Soro, Alassane Ouattara, and Henri Bedie, will meet May 18 in Ouagadougou. They will reportedly review each stage of the electoral process that must take place between now and November 29. The first step will clearly be completion of the identification/voter registration process. Catch-up sessions to reach individuals who did not register during the initial phase (see reftel) are currently being conducted. Some registration centers have never opened. Embassy understands that these centers will operate from May 21 through June 4. Registration of Ivoirians overseas is currently scheduled to be conducted from June 11 to June 28. In recent months, neither the CEI (Independent Electoral Commission) nor the FPI have demonstrated a sense of urgency about moving the registration process forward. Deadlines for completing the process have repeatedly been missed and new pools of voters identified. For example, the CEI has apparently just realized that many prisoners who are waiting trial retain the right to vote. It estimates that 6,000 prisoners in Abidjan's central prison, not to mention an unknown number in thirty-two other prisons nationwide, may need to be reached through the identification process.

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16. (SBU) The CPC will also reportedly discuss reunification of the country and the status of the deployment of the 'mixed brigades' that will ultimately provide security for the elections. Anecdotal reports indicate the deployments have foundered over logistical issues such as where FDS soldiers headed to the north are to be housed, etc.

17. (SBU) Comment. The announcement of an election date is a positive development that indicates the government is still responsive to international pressure. However, skepticism that the November 29 date will be respected is widespread among Ivoirians as well as within the diplomatic community. The outcome of the CPC meeting in Ouagadougou will be an important indicator of how confident the political parties are about this date.

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